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ABSTRACT

The relationship between movement, masculinity, and femininity is examined. Two connections are seen between movement and gender: movement as an expression of personality and movement as a medium for expressing personality. A survey of the literature is presented discussing society's concept of accepted sex role behavior. A study is reported in which three male and three female subjects who scored differently on a psychological masculinity and femininity test were given common movement tasks to perform. An analysis of task performance to determine differences is presented. (MJB)

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Masculinity, Femininity and Movement

Masculinity and movement ... Femininity and movement. How are they related? I see two connections. Firstly, movement, or non verbal behavior being an expression of personality and therefore an expression of masculinity and femininity. Secondly, considering movement as providing a medium for the expression of masculinity and femininity.

I will elaborate on both of these points, taking the latter, first, that is - considering movement as a means for the expression of masculinity and femininity.

The forms of movement provided for members of both sexes are greatly affected by society's concept of accepted sex role behavior. It has always been appropriate for males to use strong, vigorous movements. However, if males select delicate, light movements, eyebrows are raised and generally, disapproval is shown - as male students in ballet classes will attest.

Conversely, until roughly the last five years, females in our society were sanctioned against using strong movements. The situation is slowly changing, but still in many institutions women athletes are strongly discouraged from entering and working out in the weight training rooms. Light and aesthetically pleasing movements have always been approved for women.

It is probably more acceptable in our society for females to use strong movements than it is for males to take part in activities requiring light movements. Research conducted by Brown (1958) showed that amongst children aged 3-10 years, boys expressed a stronger preference for the masculine role than girls did for the feminine role. In fact, girls from 6-9 years showed a very strong preference for masculine rather than feminine things. Sex role preference in adults has also found to be strongly male, for both males and females (Dinitz, Dynes and Clarke (1954); Gallup 1955). Brown suggested factors which could account for this difference. One was the greater latitude girls have compared to boys in sex role learning. He wrote:

> For a girl to be a tomboy does not involve the censure that results when a boy is a sissy. (p. 236)

Girls have more freedom than do boys in expressing their preference for toys, play activities and clothing. Also many girls are given masculinized names

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such as Billie, Jackie, Jo, Roberta, etc., but very few boys are given feminized names.

Research has supported Eleanor Metheny's (1972) statements on the classification of suitability of sports for women. She found that where there was little use of force in activities using light implements and involving light resistance e.g., golf, badminton, tennis, these forms were acceptable to women of all socio-economic classes. However, when the amount of force required increased, either for longer periods of time or to overcome greater resistance, these activities were deemed appropriate for the female members of only lower socio-economic classes.

I found (Roberts 1974) in a cross-cultural study completed four years ago that of 20 women's sports presented, the 3 most frequently listed as being "not suitable" for women were: shot putting, discus and javelin throwing and cross-country running. Samples were drawn from U.S.A., West Germany, England and Australia and all subjects were female.

Coleman's (1961) research on American adolescent society found males received most peer approval through achievement in sports - and not through academic achievement. On the other hand, girls could succeed socially by being attractive, dressing well and/or associating with the boy's athletic program in a supportive role. Results clearly indicated that adolescent girls did not gain recognition from other girls, nor especially from boys through active sports participation.

The enormous amount of television and radio coverage devoted to men's professional sports today, the long established and strong presence of high school and intercollegiate sports programs for males compared with just the reverse for females reflect the different way in which competitive sports for men and for women have been viewed in American society.

People also choose to express their masculinity or femininity through movement away from the environment of organized sports and activities. For example, the daring, often destructive behavior of male adolescent gang members and the small, strutting steps of high-heeled young women, all give out messages of masculinity and femininity. It is interesting to note that high-heeled shoes force the wearer to take smaller steps.

Erving Goffman (1959) described the more subtle signs people give off when in the company of others, in his book "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life". He explained:

> When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed.
>
> For those present, many sources of information become accessible and many carriers (or sign-vehicles) become available for conveying this information. If acquainted with the individual, observers can glean clues from his conduct and appearance. (p. 1)

He continued:

> Sometimes the individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain .. Sometimes he will intentionally and consciously express himself in a particular way, but chiefly because the tradition of his group or social status require this kind of expression. (p. 6)

Some movements and activities are selected for the purpose of changing one's physical appearance, thus enhancing the impression of masculinity or femininity. Probably the most common reason women give for their participation in exercise programs is to maintain or improve their figures. For men, body-building is the most striking example in this category.

Of course, all movements are not conciously undertaken. Children learn from a very early age what kinds of behavior their society accepts as being appropriate for their sex. As Oakley (1976) explained:

> Biologically, people are male and female, culturally they are pressured to be masculine or feminine. (p. 82)

Raeder (1971) describes the same process using stronger language:

> 'Men's work', 'women's work', 'masculine', and 'feminine' styles, attitudes and so forth are artificial behavioral divisions of the human race. They are pigeon holes built from custom, tradition, religion, accidental choice and rank stupidity. A human individual is crammed into one of these pigeon holes by social pressure and what does not fit into the compartment is trimmed off in the psychological blood bath known as 'adjusting'. Men and women are

> forced into roles that have no bearing whatever on their nature as individual humans. (p. 7)

He explained the reason for this process was identity.

> ...Being 'masculine' is a reference point for a man as is being 'feminine' for a women...knowing what and who you are is, for a human, a psychological need. (p. 9)

Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) outlined three theories explaining the development of psychological sex differences. It occurs:

1. Through imitation: children choose same sex models (particularly the same-sex parent) and use these models... for patterning their own behavior.

2. Through praise or discouragements.

3. Through self-socialization: the child first develops a concept of what it is to be male or female and then attempts to fit his own behavior to his concept of what behavior is sex-appropriate. (p.360)

Also, physical changes at puberty affect the differentiation between males and females. If further evidence were needed on the effect testosterone has on muscular growth, one can refer to the effects of using anabolic steroids amongst athletes - and particularly women athletes. In the earlier days of anabolic steroids, before they were refined (mid 1960's), changes in the behavior of women taking these drugs were obvious - they became more aggressive.

I will now consider the second concept - that of viewing movement or non-verbal behavior as an expression of the personality and therefore, of masculinity and femininity.

There is much evidence to support the idea of mind-body unity. North, (1975) a student of Laban wrote:

> All movements of the human body are expressive although they may differ in origin and motivation. They may ... arise as a direct reflection of mood and inner attitude or they may occur to fulfill a ultilitarian purpose...
>
> ...Something of the personality of the doer is revealed in the performance of every task he undertakes.

Specialists in many fields have realized the relationship between movement and personality. In the area of Psychology, some forms of therapy are based on the belief that moving the body in certain ways will cause a change in the personality. For example, dance therapists use movements to influence emotions and behavior. Laban realized the negative influence discordant movements could have on a person's well being.

Murray (1938), Lewin (1935), Allport and Vernon (1967), all used movement in their studies of assessing personality. Sheldon (1942) and Parnell (1958), categorized people by movement characteristics and this criterion has also been used to group the mentally ill.

Psychological tests of masculinity and femininity are comprised of items on which the two sexes differ. Then a subject is classified as being masculine or feminine based on the extent to which he or she shares the characteristics generally displayed by males or females.

Harford, Willis and Deabler (1967) researched personality correlates of masculinity/femininity with over 200 male veterans. They found high masculinity was associated with.

> ... Aloofness, toughness, a practical concern with facts, unpretentiousness, suspiciousness, a tough poise and theoretical and economic values.... guiltproneness, anxiety and neurotic tendencies. (p. 884)

In contrast low masculinity scores were related to:

> ... warmth, sensitivity, Bohemianism, sophistication, acceptance, responsive emotionality and aesthetic values... brighter mental capacity and verbal skills. (p. 884)

High femininity has been found to be generally associated with poor adjustment, high anxiety and low social acceptance (Cosentino and Heilbrun, 1964. Gray, 1957: Webb, 1963).

Returning to the consideration of movement, non verbally male behavior in American society, has been indicative of high status and dominance whereas females were found to display greater emotional warmth and submission. Henley (1975) summarized the differences this way:

> ...all of the following are associated with higher status and with men; Freedom of demeanor, greater personal space, freedom to touch others, staring and withholding of personal information (particularly about emotions). Men's greater touching of women cannot be explained by sexual attraction because that explanation would require women to touch men equally. Touch is analgous to the use of first name: used reciprocally, it indicates intimacy, nonreciprocally, it indicates status. Staring, pointing, touching and interrupting are dominance gestures; lowering or averting the eyes, hesitating or stopping action or speech, cuddling to the touch, allowing interruption, and smiling are submission gestures, all more common to women than to men. (p. 291)

Recently I conducted a study in which 3 male and 3 female subjects who scored differently on a psychological masculinity and femininity test were given common movement tasks to perform. Their performances were filmed and analyzed to determine if differences existed. The instrument used was the Bem Sex Role Inventory - it differs from earlier tests of psychological masculinity and femininity in that a third score, one of psychological androgyny can also be calculated. Bem (1975) described androgynous people as being both instrumental and expressive, both assertive and yielding, both masculine and feminine. Websters (1966) dictionary defines the adjective "androgynous" as:

> "having the characteristics of both sexes; being at once male and female."

I am using it here only in the psychological sense.

Bem supported her hypothesis that;

> psychologically 'androgynous' individuals might be more likely than either masculine or feminine individuals to display sex role adaptability across situations, engaging in situationally effective behavior without regard for its stereotype as more appropriate for one sex or the other (p. 634)

Both male and female androgynous subjects showed "masculine" independence in a situation under pressure to conform and "feminine" playfulness when given the chance to interact with a kitten. In contrast the nonandrogynous

subjects displayed deficiency in one or other of the two situations. The psychologically feminine subjects conformed more under pressure and the psychologically masculine subjects showed least interaction with the kitten and indicated they had not enjoyed playing with it as much as did the psychologically feminine and androgynous subjects.

In my study, the BSRI was completed by over 200 undergraduate students attending a large university. The 6 subjects were selected on the basis of their scores, a male and female pair represented each of the 3 classifications of expressing psychologically high masculinity, high femininity and androgyny. Because of possible racial differences in movement patterns, race was kept constant - all six subjects were white.

The tasks they performed involved the everyday gross motor activities of walking, climbing stairs, sitting down and standing up, picking up and carrying a book, running fifteen yards, standing up on a bench, getting down and throwing a tennis ball against a wall just twenty feet away.

A fine motor task was also added-this involved peeling an orange and discarding the peel in a nearby trashcan. Their performances were filmed in slow motion and analyzed by an Effort/Shape observer - a person certified by the Dance Notation Bureau in New York to identify movement qualities according to Laban's system. These movement qualities are light and strong, flexible and direct, sudden and sustained, bound and free.

Some interesting results were obvious from the film. The psychologically feminine male was so non-aggressive he walked forward with a slight backward lean. He did not allow his arms to swing freely when walking nor running. In throwing the tennis ball against the wall he used excessive and uncalled-for force.

When peeling the orange, the psychologically masculine male, curled all four fingers of one hand under the peel and ripped it off. He was holding the orange so firmly with his other hand that the juice ran out of it in a steady stream. In contrast to the psychologically feminine male, the psychologically masculine one threw the ball with a wrist flick action using a minimum amount of effort.

Both the male and female androgynous subjects performed their tasks with efficient, flowing movements. The male androgynous subject was the only one who completely peeled the orange in the forty-five seconds allocated to the filming of this task.

The psychologically feminine female turned her feet out when she walked and more noticeably, threw the ball from her tip toes with her feet together.

The psychologically masculine female's arm movements when ascending and descending the stairs were exaggerated. She climbed the stairs holding her right arm bent at 90° at the elbow but with it externally rotated at the shoulder. Similarly, on descent both arms were externally rotated so that the hands were held wide out to either side.

It is interesting to note that the two cases of exaggeration in movements were done by subjects who belonged to opposite psychological and sex groups, i.e., the psychological feminine male who threw with excessive force and the psychologically masculine female who used exaggerated light gestural movements. Perhaps, the reason for this could have been compensation - or rather over compensation. He could have been aware that in our society strong movements are approved for men and similarly the psychologically masculine female probably felt more feminine using very light gestural movements.

Two other problems were dealt with in this study. One was to compare the movement qualities of the subjects - as identified by the Effort/Shape observer, with their psychological grouping to find if commonalities or differences occured. Subjects were given the same directions prior to the performance of the tasks, which were filmed in slow motion. An Effort/Shape observer then repeatedly viewed the film and counted the occurrence of each of the eight movement qualities for the subjects' postural and gestural movements.

I had made several hypotheses:

1) that the two psychologically feminine subjects would display significantly more light qualities in their movements than of any other quality.
2) that the two psychologically masculine subjects would display significantly more strong qualities in their movements than of any other quality.
3) that there would be no significant difference between the use of light and strong movement qualities by the two androgynous subjects.

Analysis of the data showed the presence of a strong sex difference i.e., the psychologically feminine female did employ more light movements than did any other subject but her male counterpart did not. The psychologically masculine male did use more strong movements than of any other kind but his female counterpart did not. The psychologically androgynous male did not show any significant difference between his use of light and of strong movement qualities, but the female used significantly more light movements.

Therefore, the first 3 hypotheses were rejected.

However, further analysis done on the subjects' movement qualities as identified by the Effort/Shape observer showed that when compared by psychological group membership there was greater similarity between subjects then when a comparsion was made on the basis of sex, i.e., the psychologically feminine male's movements were more similar to the psychologically femine female's than they were to those of the other two males.

The remaining subproblem was to determine if people would rate the masculinity and femininity of movements differently if the sex of the performer was obvious or hidden.

In order to conceal the sex of the subjects on the film, it was animated. This task was accomplished by projecting separate frames of the original film onto sheets of paper hung from two nails in a wall and drawing separate outlines of the figures. Outlines of the female subjects were altered by flattening the bust line when necessary. Also outlines of certain objects such as the bench and stairs were drawn as required.

To make the separate drawings into a film, a special animated stand and camera were used to photograph every drawing in sequence and then the resultant film was processed. Only the filmed performances of the gross motor tasks were animated, not the orange peeling task.

Using both the animated film sequences and the actual films where the sex of the performers was identified, a final film was edited and shown to 120 undergraduate students who were asked to rate the masculinity or femininity of the movements. All of the animated film sequences were shown first, followed by the original film.

The projector was stopped after each movement sequence to enable the students to indicate their opinions on an answer sheet. They were asked to select one of the following four ratings for the movements - Masculine, Feminine, Neither or Both. There were scales of gradation for the Masculine and Feminine categories.

Here is an outline of the results - firstly, considering the two psychologically feminine subjects. The female's movements were rated clearly as being Feminine and definitely not Masculine, Neither or Both. Although the psychologically feminine male's movements were not rated as being Feminine when compared with those of the other two males, they received the highest Feminine score, the lowest Masculine score and the highest ratings in the Neither and Both categories. Of the two psychologically masculine subjects, the male's movements received the highest Masculine ratings and the lowest Feminine ratings of all subjects. However, his female counterpart received the reverse - the highest Feminine and the lowest Masculine ratings. The manner in which she ascended and descended the stairs, with arms held wide out to the sides, probably influenced her ratings a great deal.

Finally, ratings given to the movements of the psychologically androgynous female showed she received the highest number of scores in the Neither and Both categories. As mentioned earlier, her movements were very efficient. Her male counterpart's movements were rated clearly as being Masculine.

A comparison conducted on the data showed that the decisions of the people rating the masculinity and femininity of the movements were influenced when the sex of the performer was apparent.

In concluding this presentation on Masculinity, Femininity and Movement, it is interesting to note that adjectives used to describe masculinity and femininity very often have movement implications. For example, some of the following adjectives for masculinity are used in the BSRI:

athletic, assertive,
strong personality, forceful, dominant, aggressive
and competitive.

and these adjectives are used for femininity measures:

yielding, shy, sensitive to the needs of
others, eager to soothe hurt feelings,
soft-spoken, tender and gentle.

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